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ABSTRACT

The career intentions of a group of students enrolled in the first year of the Diploma of Teaching (Early Childhood) at Palmerston North College of Education in New Zealand were studied. The research was prompted by a concern that most students aspired to work in kindergartens and few students were choosing to enter child care occupations. A sample of 65 students was surveyed and a response rate of 71 percent was obtained. The ethnic origin of 74 percent of the respondents was Pakeha or non-Maori New Zealander, 96 percent were female, 96 percent spoke English as their first language, 24 percent were parents whose children had attended a variety of early childhood centers, and 67 percent had previously worked in an early childhood center. Many students reported dissatisfaction with their student teaching experience, particularly at child care centers. Kindergartens were ranked with higher status than child care centers. The major disadvantages of working in child care were seen as the pay, length of work year, and hours of work. Staff-child ratios were viewed as a disadvantage in kindergartens. A total of 43 percent of respondents desired to work only in kindergartens, while 9 percent only wanted to work in child care centers and 39 percent were satisfied with either location. It is concluded that some progress has been made in the acceptance of child care as a viable work option. Contains 10 references. (LB)

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**A STUDY OF CAREER INTENTIONS:
1990 INTAKE DIPLOMA OF TEACHING (EARLY CHILDHOOD) STUDENTS**

**PAPER PRESENTED TO
FIFTH EARLY CHILDHOOD CONCENTION
DUNEDIN
1991**

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I would like to thank Margery Renwick for the time and input she has put into assisting me with this project. After discussing the project with Margery she kindly gave permission for some of the questions from her survey (1989) to be incorporated into my study.

I would also like to thank the staff and students of Palmerston North College of Education for their time and energy in supplying me with the information contained herein.

1. INTRODUCTION:

The investigation I carried out concerns the career intentions of the group of students currently enrolled in the first year of the Diploma of Teaching (Early Childhood) at Palmerston North College of Education. Originally I had wished to pursue this study with students at Palmerston North and Dunedin enrolled in their third and final year of this course. I found, however, that Margery Renwick (1989) of the New Zealand Council for Educational Research was currently following the first intake of students as they commenced their training at each College throughout New Zealand. Renwick's research project is a comprehensive, longitudinal study designed to evaluate the effect of the new three year integrated course of study in early childhood. My investigation, therefore, was adapted to investigate the attitudes of the third intake of students at Palmerston North and compare them with the preliminary results that Renwick has produced.

My interest in this topic has been aroused by the students I come into contact with through my position as an Associate Teacher for Palmerston North College of Education and my involvement in the local childcare scene in Palmerston North.

2. BACKGROUND:

2.1 Previous Research

On reading Renwick's Interim Report (1989) where she presents her initial findings, I found confirmed what I had suspected - that is, out of 70 students surveyed, 40 wished to work in kindergartens and only 7 in childcare. Of the remaining 23 students, 2 wished to teach in junior schools and 21 were still undecided. Even allowing for a large proportion of the undecided students ultimately opting for a career in childcare there is no way that students entering the childcare field will come near the 50% mark of graduates. This is not a very promising outlook for childcare, especially when we look at the figures Sylvia Allan (1989) produced in her report on "Qualifications and Training" conducted with early childhood workers. Of 1957 respondents from licensed childcare centres, 603 (31%) had no formal early childhood qualifications. Kindergartens on the other hand produced 1305 respondents with only 70 (5%) who had no formal early childhood qualification. Of the three major early childhood services in New Zealand Playcentre fared the worst - of 2321 respondents a staggering 1358 (59%) had no formal early childhood qualification. However, one must acknowledge the uniqueness of the Playcentre movement and remember that a large number of these people could possibly be in process of achieving a Playcentre qualification.

2.2 Preferred Work Destination

It is of concern, however, to note that although a large proportion of prospective graduates may wish to enter the Kindergarten service there may not be the positions available for them to fulfill this desire. Casual observation of the kindergarten vacancies advertised in "The New Zealand Education Gazette" in the latter months of 1989 did not reveal a too healthy employment prospect. One "Gazette" (1989) recorded 22 teacher and 7 head teacher vacancies. Allowing for a conservative estimate of 20 graduates from each of the four Colleges who would have been graduating students, plus qualified teachers returning to service after a break, this does not augur well for the most recently qualified.

One could assume that if there was a shortage of positions in kindergartens that graduates would be driven into childcare positions as an alternative. Even if this view holds true, I believe that childcare will still suffer as graduates will enter these positions with the idea that it is only a short-term prospect until a kindergarten position becomes available. This would leave childcare still in the unenviable position of high staff turnover. I also believe that this view will suffer on closer examination because of the issue concerning pay for childcare workers. Although pay and conditions have improved greatly over recent years, childcare employees still lag behind their kindergarten counterparts in rates of pay (see Fig. 1).

Fig. 1

**PAY RATES FOR KINDERGARTEN
AND CHILDCARE EMPLOYEES**

Kindergarten	
P1 scale	\$20,463
Childcare	
Trained worker scale	\$18,720*

*Childcare pay rates are quoted as hourly rates.
This figure has been arrived at by equating \$9.60
per hour to a 37.5 hour work week.

This factor alone could well influence early childhood graduates to ignore childcare positions in favour of other employment - especially when one remembers the fee burden tertiary students now carry. A percentage of graduates will leave college with loans needing to be repaid, so employment which enables them to meet this financial obligation will be to the forefront in decision-making.

2.3 Funding and Training

Crispin Gardiner (1989) has made a plea for more trained staff in the childcare field. He made the observation that "trained staff have become hard to get" when referring to the obsolete method of funding for early childhood centres. The old funding system paid centres a subsidy for every trained staff member. Even with this money available centres found it difficult to find qualified staff. One would hope that the new method of funding (which funds the child and not the staff) would allow for better pay and conditions for all early childhood workers in childcare (particularly those with recognised qualifications), but unfortunately this still has not been achieved. As mentioned above, pay and conditions for childcare "workers" still fall considerably behind those of kindergarten "teachers". Until the status and qualifications of personnel employed in childcare centres are accepted as being equal to those in the kindergarten service, I believe that there will always be an insufficiency of "quality" people choosing childcare as their career option.

2.4 Unionism

The issue of equality between services has been fought for, until recently, by the Early Childhood Worker's Union (ECWU) which covered employees in childcare centres. However, the Union had to conduct their fight for better pay and conditions each year with four separate groups of employers. One group, called the Consenting Parties award, covers workers from centres where employers agreed to award coverage from the inception of the Union when unionism was not compulsory. This group of workers enjoys the most favourable award conditions. Another group covers workers in the south of the South Island where they felt special conditions applied - however their award coverage is approaching Consenting Parties benefits. A third group covers workers employed at University run childcare centres. The last group covers those under a National award and applies to all workers whose employers were not party to the previous three awards. These employers are reluctant to agree to the large increases in pay and conditions which would bring their employees up to the level of the previous three awards, let alone consider equality with kindergarten teachers. This state of affairs has very recently been reinforced with the announcement in late October 1990 (Dominion Sunday Times, 1990) that the National Award for early childhood workers has been settled. These workers will have their pay rates increased 17% for untrained, 24% for trained and 27% for supervisors. When one considers that these worker's pay rates were lower than the other three Awards and that Consenting Parties and Otago/Southland awards granted workers increases between 29% - 38%, it is clear that the National award worker's remuneration benefits are falling even further behind. This attitude leads one to believe that this group would prefer to employ fewer trained people so that the wages component of running a childcare centre could be kept low so as to allow expenditure elsewhere. I leave the destination of where that money would go open to conjecture. In recent

months however ECWU and KTA (Kindergarten Teachers Association) have merged to form one Union CECUA (Combined Early Childhood Union of Aotearoa). What this will mean for early childhood workers remains to be seen as both former unions have awards in place until mid-1991.

2.5 Burn-Out

2.5.1 Passmore (1988) studied childcare workers and burn-out. She queried the relationship between high turnover of staff and burn-out (a term used to describe the worker's physical/mental condition when a job becomes too much). Passmore's subjects were all trained childcare workers who had completed a one year course at either Auckland Teacher's College or Wellington Polytechnic. The answers to her question as to why they had left childcare work revolved around lack of money (i.e. poor pay) - one subject earned more on the Domestic Purposes Benefit - and poor conditions. The "babysitting" image was also prevalent as a reason for moving on. Subjects felt that the value of the work carried out in childcare centres was very undervalued.

2.5.2 Growden (1989) also found that similar reasons applied to the subjects of her study involving childcare workers' attitudes to their work and workplace.

2.5.3 Renwick's study also reflected this when she reports that "by far the most common reason [for not wanting to work in childcare] was the poor pay and working conditions including long hours and short holidays".

2.6 General

As stated previously, Renwick's results have confirmed what I had thought to be the attitude of students - i.e. that a career in the kindergarten service is more desirable than one in the childcare service. At the outset of this investigation I hoped to provide evidence that attitudes towards childcare were improving - in comparison to Renwick's results. For many years a stigma has been attached to the use of formal childcare arrangements. This, no doubt, arose because of Bowlby's theory of maternal deprivation (McDonald 1977). McDonald, however argues that this theory has acted more as a myth to keep women in the home (i.e. out of the workplace) rather than for the benefit of the child. In recent years though the need for more places in full-time childcare has become apparent and society is moving towards an acceptance of this trend. We therefore need to ensure that the training systems in place are producing sufficient graduates to meet the needs of the various early childhood services. This means that the courses offered must ensure equality of recognition for all early childhood services for whom they are providing training. By conducting this piece of research at this time I am hoping to show that this is indeed happening by comparing my results directly with Renwick's (1989). If the results still show the discrepancy which Renwick produced then I feel that some adjustments will need to be made by all concerned - not only childcare and kindergarten personnel and training providers, but by educating the public generally as to the benefits available to their child/ren and themselves if they use childcare facilities on whatever basis they require.

3 RESEARCH QUESTION:

The question I chose to research, therefore, is:

What are the career intentions of students currently enrolled in the first year (1990) of the Diploma in Teaching (Early Childhood) at Palmerston North?

4 METHOD:

The method selected to gain the information required for this investigation was a questionnaire (see Appendix). This questionnaire was drawn up and all questions were designed so as not to reflect a bias towards any particular early childhood service. Of necessity, though, where alternatives were offered, kindergarten and childcare were the named services and where necessary a box was available as an alternative to these two choices.

It was intended to survey all 1990 first year students in Early Childhood at Palmerston North College of Education. This represented a sample of 65 students. This number also included 9 students who are participating in a shortened course (i.e. 1 or 2 years of study as opposed to a full 3 year course). This group of 9 students may actually be

studying at a more advanced level than the main body of first year students, but by the very fact that this is their first year of study at Palmerston North College of Education they have been included in this survey.

It was proposed that the cooperation of College staff would be desirable so that the students could be surveyed at a pre-determined time. This cooperation was willingly given and with the exception of shortened course students - all other questionnaires were completed on the same day.

A small pilot study was carried out - using a group of early childhood colleagues as the respondents. This was done to ensure the clarity of the questionnaire, and also to gain an approximate time length for College staff.

Margery Renwick was also consulted in the early stages of planning this project and she supplied copies of her questionnaire and results. This was helpful in preparing my questionnaire and for the results she had obtained for comparison with the data collected through this investigation.

5 RESULTS

5.1 Number of Respondents

Of the roll of 65 first year students enrolled in the Early Childhood course at Palmerston North College of Education 46 replies (71%) were received. Of these, 3 replies were from a group of 9 students enrolled in a shortened course of study, and although they were studying at 2nd and 3rd year level they are in their first year at Palmerston North College of Education. They are therefore, technically considered as first year students. 8 students were absent from College at the time of the survey. Replies were not received from 11 students (5 first year full course and 6 first year shortened course). It is presumed that they declined to take part in this study.

5.2 Gender, Age, Ethnicity

Of the 46 replies - 44 (96%) were female and 2 (4%) were male. 28 (61%) students were in the 17-20 year age group, 5 (11%) in 21-25 year age group, 2 (4%) in 26-29 year age group and 11 (24%) in the 30+ year age group (see Fig. 2).

34 (74%) described their ethnic origin as Pakeha/non-Maori New Zealander and 4 (9%) described themselves as Maori. The remaining group of students contained 1 Samoan, 1 Pacific Islander, 1 Asian, 3 Maori/Pakeha and 1 described themselves as Bicultural and Pakeha. 1 student did not identify her ethnic origin.

5.3 Language

The question relating to language resulted in 44 (96%) identifying English as their first language; 1 with Malayan; 1 with Samoan. Only 3 (7%) reported as being fluent in another language - 2 of which stated their second language as English and 1 as Maori. 1 student said that though she was not fluent yet, she was learning Maori.

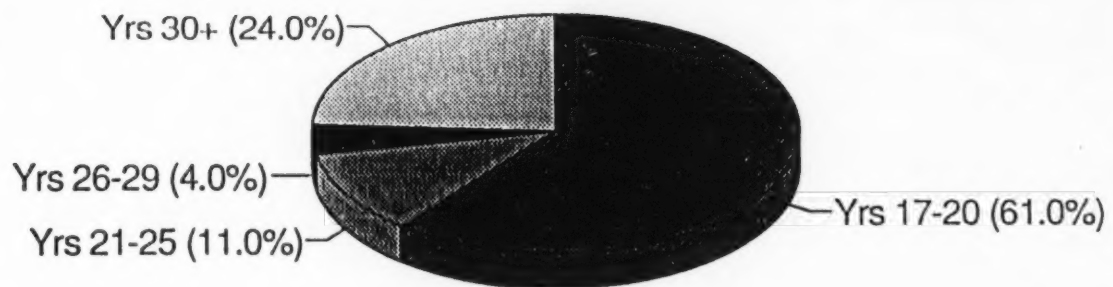
5.4 Contact with Early Childhood Centres

11 (24%) respondents identified themselves as parents. Their children had attended a variety of early childhood centres - some of whom had sampled up to four different types of early childhood care. Only 2 children had been cared for in a private home by a paid caregiver. None had been placed in either an all day child care centre or a sessional child care centre. One said that their child/ren had not received any out of the home care or attended an early childhood centre.

Before the students had enrolled at College 31 (67%) said that they had worked in an early childhood centre. Several had experienced work in more than 1 type of centre. The majority, 21 (46%), reported work in a kindergarten; 12 (26%) in a childcare centre and the rest in a variety of other types of early childhood centres. 13 (28%) reported that they had been paid employees; 13 (28%) had worked voluntarily; 9 (20%) had taken part as high school work experience; 5 (11%) as Access trainees; 1 (2%) as Polytechnic work experience; 4 (9%) had been parent helpers; 1 (2%) had participated in an MOT Traffic Safety Programme; and 2 (4%) said that they had relieved at an early childhood centre - but it wasn't clear if this was paid or voluntary.

Fig. 2

AGE GROUPS OF STUDENTS ENROLLED IN FIRST YEAR



5.5 Upgrading Training

4 (9%) said that they were undertaking this course to upgrade an existing early childhood qualification - 2 (4%) have a New Zealand Childcare Association Certificate and 1 (2%) had a Field-Based Certificate - but did not identify who had given this training. 1 of the 4 answered NIL to this - so it is unclear what training this person had.

5.6 Ultimate Work Destination

20 (43%) identified themselves as only wanting to work in a kindergarten; 4 (9%) as only wanting to work in a childcare centre; 18 (39%) said they intended to seek work in both areas with 4 (9%) also saying that they would look at other areas as well; 1 wanted to work in a Pacific Island Language Nest; 1 in either kindergarten or another area (but not childcare); 1 in either childcare or another area (but not kindergarten). One respondent was undecided.

5.7 Alternative Work Option

When asked if they would look at another early childhood area if they could not find work in their chosen area - 41 (89%) answered "yes"; 4 (9%) answered "no" and 1 was undecided. Of the 41 who would look at another area, a variety of choices was offered - 15 would look at Nannying; 15 at Childcare (but one would place conditions); 6 at Kindergarten, and the rest listed choices such as Playcentre, Kohanga Reo, Special Needs, New Entrants, Counsellor for Maori, social work, return to College for further training. 3 did not know. The 3 that answered "no" to this question and would not look at another early childhood area listed their reasons as - "prefer social work in early childhood"; "only interested in working with over 2's"; "only want to work with children and not in administration"; "hours of work in relation to my own children getting home from school".

5.8 Previous Contact with Early Childhood Centres

When asked if previous contact with early childhood centres had influenced their choice of where to work - 36 (78%) said "yes" and 10 (22%) said "no". There were a variety of reasons - many talked of the enjoyment of the work, several preferred kindergartens because of better pay, conditions, etc. One respondent said she wanted "to teach, not just take care of children". Also several mentioned preferring the "structure" of kindergarten. Those in favour of childcare mentioned, "family atmosphere", "babies through to school age", "previous work experience", "childcare is more personal than kindergarten".

5.9 Changed Views Regarding Work Destination

The next two questions related to changing views about where to work and the reasons. 13 (28%) said they had changed their minds since starting the course and 31 (67%) still held firm to the original choice. One was wavering between "yes" and "no". The reasons for changing ranged through "more experience", "enjoyed childcare, but could teach more in kindergarten", "now considering childcare as well/instead of kindergarten", "always wanted kindergarten, now prefer childcare, but kindergarten wages", and "now prefer kindergarten over childcare".

5.10 Course

The questionnaire then moved on to consideration of the course so far.

40 (87%) felt that their course gave equal recognition to both kindergarten and childcare services - 5 (11%) thought it had not, and 1 was undecided - placing the tick between the "yes" and "no" boxes. Of the 5 who felt recognition was not equal - 3 thought it favoured kindergartens more and 2 felt that childcare was more favoured. Reasons included - "language and texts used by lecturers"; "lecturers talk quite a bit about birth to two years"; "some tasks and assignments are set for children over the age of 2, e.g. Prof. Studies"; "0 - 2 could be addressed more in Curriculum and Programme Planning areas. Text used, too, could be given more attention".

5.11 Postings

The next questions referred to the postings that students are sent out on for teaching practice. 13 (28%) said that they had experienced difficulties during these sessions and 33 (72%) had no problems. The 13 that had problems were broken down into two groups - 9 (69%) had a problem on a childcare posting and 5 (38%) had a problem on a kindergarten posting. One student had experienced a problem in both areas. All the problems arose between students and associates and teachers. Lack of communication was mentioned several times - this reflected on both childcare and kindergarten. One student mentioned that on the kindergarten posting the staff were so efficient that she felt superfluous. On the other hand, one student said of her childcare posting "my associate was unfriendly, unhelpful, not knowledgeable, negative towards children. Other more qualified staff have been extremely helpful". Another claimed that the childcare centre was "badly run and staff hard to children" and another "teachers were not professional most times, especially where the children are concerned". One student complained that she was "feeling inferior, treated as a slave, i.e. clean up" - this referred to both kindergarten and childcare.

5.12 Student's View of Status of Childcare and Kindergarten

The next two questions related to the student's view of status of kindergarten and childcare (see Figs. 3A and 3B). All students ranked kindergarten between 3 and 5 (5 being high, 1 low). However, childcare was ranked right across the board from 1 - 5. 4 felt they could not rank childcare at this point. The majority of kindergarten responses were at rankings 4 (20 responses) and 5 (21 responses), 3 gained 2 responses. 16 ranked childcare status at 4 and 12 ranked it at 5 - the remaining responses ranked childcare 3 and lower. When this question is looked at in comparison with how each student ranked both - 14 ranked both kindergarten and childcare as equal; 20 ranked kindergarten as of higher status than childcare; 5 ranked childcare as higher status than kindergarten.

Fig. 3A

STATUS RANKINGS OF KINDERGARTEN AND CHILDCARE

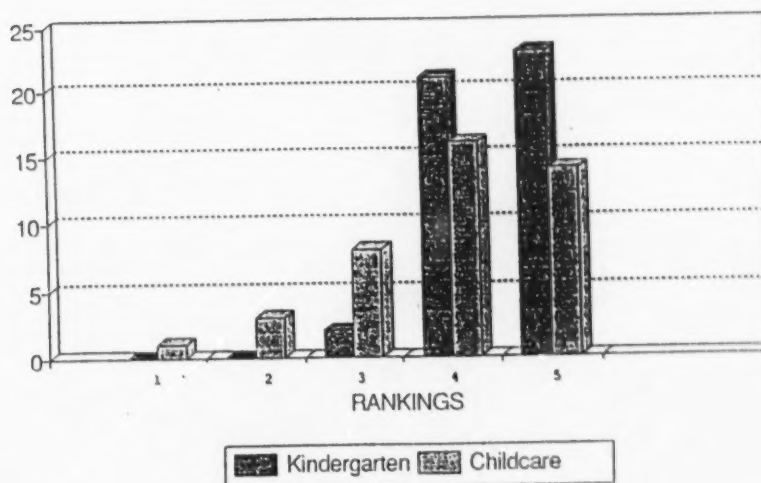
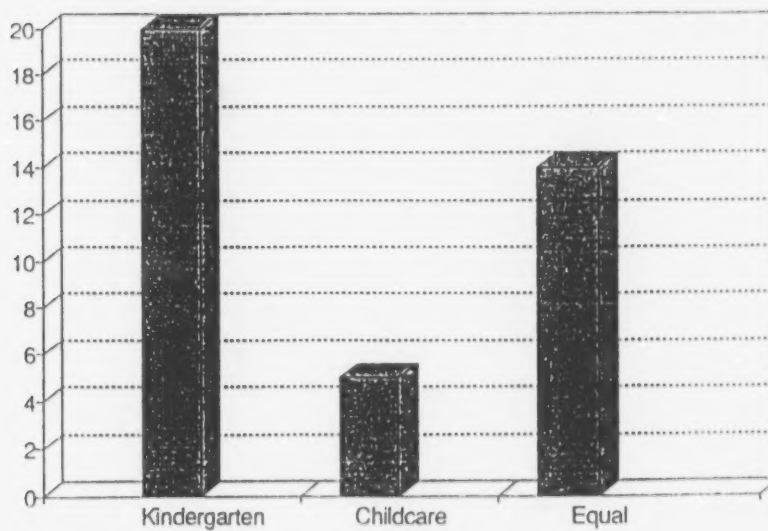


Fig. 3B

COMPARATIVE RANKINGS

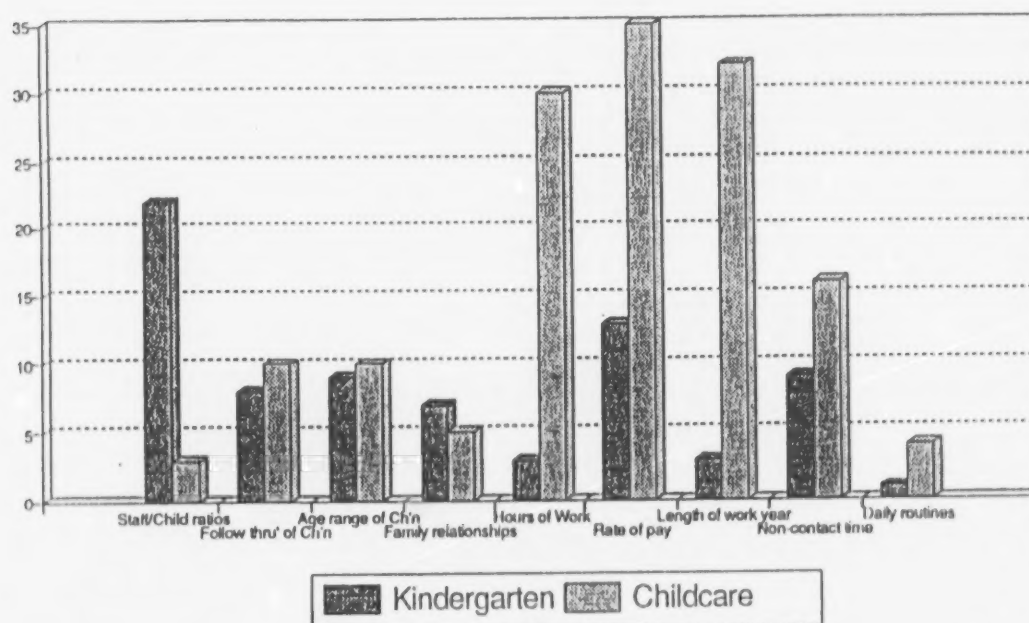


5.13 Opinions Regarding Kindergarten and Childcare

The final question related to a range of ideas which could be seen as either advantages or disadvantages for working in either childcare or kindergarten (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4

PERCEIVED DISADVANTAGES FOR WORKING IN KINDERGARTEN AND CHILDCARE



Looking at how these ideas ranked as disadvantages - staff/child ratios - 22 felt this was a problem for kindergarten, but only 3 for childcare. Rate of pay was a disadvantage for 13 relating to kindergarten, but 35 felt it a disadvantage in childcare (one student ticked this box 3 times to record her feelings). 30 felt that the hours of work in childcare represented a disadvantage, compared to only 3 feeling this way for kindergarten. Length of work year was also a problem in childcare - 32 responses compared with 3 for kindergarten. Non-contact time also showed up as a disadvantage for 16 people in the childcare section compared to 9 in the kindergarten section. One person did not rank any ideas in the kindergarten section and 4 did not rank the childcare section. The remaining ideas ranked fairly closely for both kindergarten and childcare.

5.14 Further Comment

The last page of the questionnaire invited any further comments that students wanted to make. Approximately 25% took this chance and the comments ranged from "I'm not sure that I want to teach but I do enjoy the area of E.C." to one who feels "child psychology interests me and am considering doing a post-graduate course in this area if this is possible". Wherever one student decides to work though her intention is "to try to get as many people 'informed' and 'educated' about the importance of early childhood education and services.

6 DISCUSSION

6.1 Number of Respondents

When the results of this investigation are compared with Renwick's (1989) results we find some interesting results. 71 took part in Renwick's study (students from both Palmerston North and Dunedin). However, 43 from Palmerston North answered Renwick's survey and 46 completed this survey. Therefore, the sample from Palmerston North is approximately the same - although Renwick's results were combined from the two groups.

6.2 Age and Gender

As in Renwick's study all but two were female. This survey showed that there is a larger percentage of older students now enrolled - 14% of Renwick's sample was 25 and older compared to 28% from this study.

6.3 Ethnic Origin

Ethnic origin also showed up some differences - Renwick produced 89% as being Pakeha or non-Maori New Zealander. This study produced 74% in the same category. This shows that a positive progression has been made in this area - i.e. encouragement of Maori and other ethnic groups to study at a tertiary level. However, the first language reported is still overwhelmingly English - 95%. So, although there are now more students from other than the Pakeha culture, there are still very few students who speak anything other than English. This fact is of note when considered alongside the issue of biculturalism. If New Zealand is to move positively to being a bicultural, and thence a multi-cultural, society I feel that we should be encouraging students in learning the language of our indigenous people.

6.4 Parents

As would be expected with more students in the older age group in this study - there are now more parents who are students. 24% of respondents to this survey were parents compared to 14% in Renwick's. As in Renwick's report the majority had used a variety of early childhood facilities for their own child/ren. However, I was intrigued to find none reported in this survey that they had used a childcare centre - either full or sessional care. It leads one to speculate that none of the students now enrolled have pre-schoolers. Or, if they do, that they have a spouse at home to care for the child. Another alternative could be that they have made arrangements for the free care of their child with a relation (i.e. grandparent).

6.5 Previous Contact with Early Childhood Centres

Another big difference emerged between the two surveys - this time in previous contact with early childhood centres prior to enrolling at College. Renwick reported 48% as having worked in an early childhood centre. This survey showed an increase to 67% of students with previous work experience in early childhood. As in Renwick's study there was a range of types of work experience from high school across the board to full-time employees. This I feel shows a commitment to improving the quality of people who will work with our future generations. Obviously, the previous contact (in a variety of forms) has spurred these people on to increasing their knowledge of early childhood, and that these same people have seen that there is indeed a career to be had in this field.

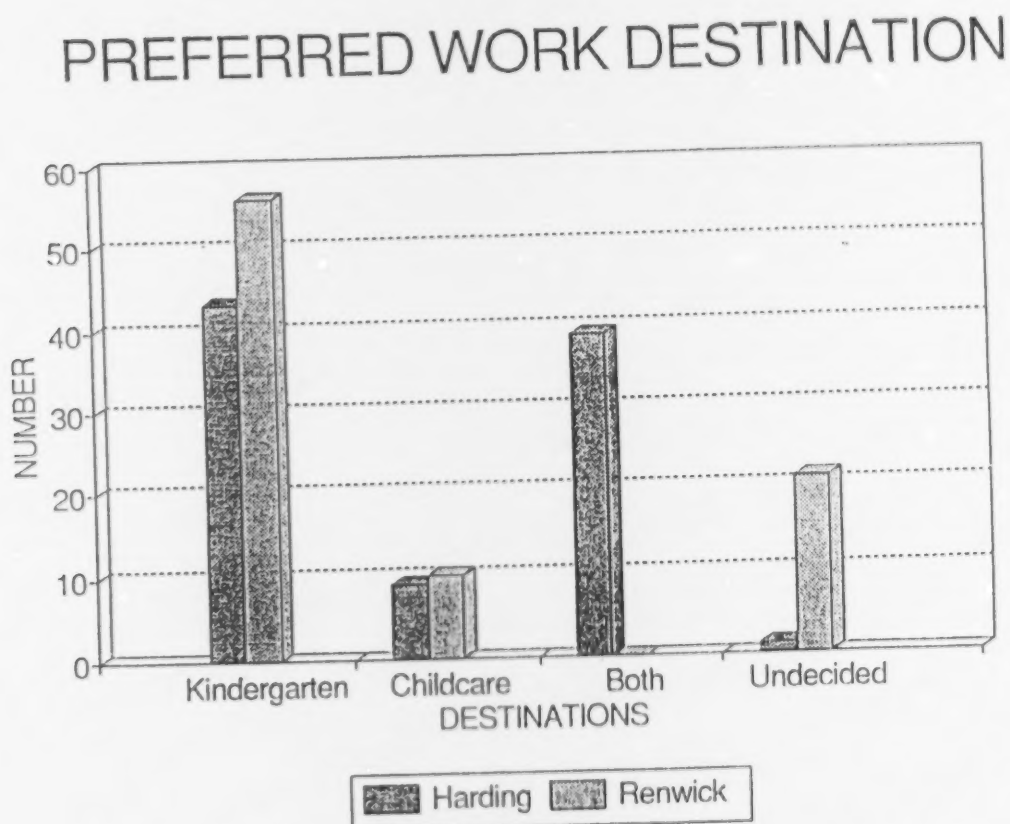
6.6 Upgrading Training

I had speculated at the outset of this project that there was a possibility of an artificially inflated figure for those interested in childcare because of those enrolled to upgrade qualifications already held. Interestingly, only 4 students reported that they were in this category. I had expected to find a larger percentage here. This may change, however, in the near future when the uncertainty regarding equivalence of qualifications is settled and currently employed personnel find out where they stand on the recently introduced points scale. This is an issue of great concern to many people working in the childcare field. A Blueprint for training was issued in mid-1990, but this document set out general guidelines regarding equivalency. The finer detail regarding specific qualifications held by people in the field has yet to be finalised. At the time of writing this report the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) have still not made public this information.

6.7 Preferred Work Destination

When we move on to preferred work destination I found some interesting comparisons with Renwick's results (Fig. 5).

Fig. 5



In this study 43% identified as only desiring to work in kindergarten and 9% as desiring only to work in childcare. This compares with Renwick's figures of 56% and 10% respectively. It was also shown in this survey that 39% would consider both work options. Only 1 student in this study was undecided compared to 21 in Renwick's study. I feel that this shows students are now entering College with a more open mind as to the work options offered in early childhood. This view is also reflected in the large number (89%) who said that they would look at another early childhood area for employment if they were unsuccessful in their chosen area. This reinforces the view that they see early childhood as a definite career option.

6.8 Consideration of Course

As shown in the Results the majority of students believed that their course so far has given equal recognition to both kindergarten and childcare - the split of the five who thought unequal attention had been given was almost evenly divided between the two services. This reflects a somewhat different view to some casual opinions I have gained over recent years. So, it is encouraging to note that at this point the majority of these students feel strongly that each service is getting fair treatment.

6.9 Posting Experiences

The most disturbing information gained, I feel, was the amount of dissatisfaction with the "postings" the students experience throughout their course. As reported earlier, 13 students reported "difficulties" during a posting. ("Posting" is a term used to describe a length of time a student goes out from College into an early childhood centre - kindergarten, childcare, playcentre, etc. - to gain practical experience and to conduct observations and assigned tasks). Of those 13 students 9 reported problems in childcare centres as compared with 5 who had a problem in a kindergarten setting. I found the reports which criticized childcares were more strongly worded than those referring to kindergartens, and they suggested a lack of professionalism and possible lack of training and sympathy to children. This is a sad indictment on a group of local centres who have worked hard to promote an image of "quality" care. One possible explanation could be that some of these centres have become so involved with the continually changing interpretations of the regulations with regard to what the physical surroundings (i.e. buildings and grounds) should consist of, that they have forgotten the all-important reason of why they are there - the children. However, in fairness to these local centres - one must also remember that a bias has been shown in preference for kindergartens by the respondents. So, it is maybe not surprising that more problems present themselves in childcare postings because the students are not so enthused in this work situation. One student wrote "One of the workers in the day-care centre wouldn't let me get involved and I found it frustrating ...". This I feel could well suggest a childcare employee feeling threatened by a newcomer. Childcare personnel are in the grips of a major problem at present. For many years they have taken part in their own industry training - but recently changes have come about rapidly with little consultation at the grass-roots level. Childcare employees are now anxiously waiting for the publication of the previously mentioned points systems which will peg their existing training at various levels on a scale. For most, this points scale will mean that their training is no longer considered totally adequate and they will be faced with many hours of further training in order to upgrade to equivalence with the three year College course. However, for whatever reason these comments have been made, I feel that childcare centres need to take a look at what is happening in their centres.

6.10 Status of Kindergarten and Childcare

It was interesting to see, too, how the respondents ranked the status of kindergartens and childcares. The rankings ranged from 1 (low) to 5 (high). Not one respondent ranked kindergartens 1 or 2, and only two ranked it as 3.

Childcare, on the other hand, was ranked at every level by some respondents with the largest number ranking it at level 4. The bias towards kindergartens showed again here with 20 respondents ranking kindergartens with higher status than childcare. Only 5 felt that childcare was of higher status - a distinct minority opinion. It must be noted, however, that although students were asked to rank childcare and kindergarten as they themselves perceive it - it is difficult to know whether or not they took sufficient note of the personal view asked for. Perhaps they ranked the two services according to perceptions held by the community, which could reflect a quite different viewpoint to their own. It was satisfying to note though that 14 felt they were of equal status - so at least there is a body of students coming through the system who place the two services on an equal footing.

6.11 Opinions Regarding Childcare and Kindergarten

The final point of discussion was the range of ideas presented at the end of the questionnaire. The respondents were asked to rank them with regard to kindergarten and childcare as advantages or disadvantages. Even at this early point in their training I found that the students felt able to rank these ideas. Three ideas came through as major disadvantage relating to childcare - these were:

- (1) rate of pay;
- (2) length of work year;
- (3) hours of work.

This ties in with Renwick's results when she reported that:

By far the most common reason [for not wanting to work in childcare] was the poor pay and working conditions including long hours and short holidays.

Although it did not show up as such a major concern, rate of pay was also ranked as a disadvantage in the kindergarten area by 13 respondents.

Staff/child ratios came through as the major disadvantage relating to kindergartens. It is of interest to record here that the respondents are aware that kindergartens provide a low staff/child ratio (i.e. 2 or 3 staff to 40 children), whereas childcare provides a better ratio (i.e. 1 staff to 10 children over 2 years old, or 1 staff to 5 under 2 year olds).

Non-contact time in childcare was also a problem for 16 students. Under childcare Awards, employees must be allowed a period of non-contact for duties other than working directly with children, depending on how long their work day is. Maybe students are not receiving this benefit whilst they are in some centres, and if this is the case then this is possibly something the College could look at negotiating with centres when sending students out on postings. Kindergarten teachers have five hours non-contact time per week - this time is to allow for programme planning, minor maintenance, administration, parent contact, but at times some of this period is used to offer pre-entry classes for the next intake of children. The Consenting Parties award mentioned earlier allows for one hour non-contact time per day for a work day length of over six hours. This would seem to be a better arrangement than some kindergarten teachers have, as the childcare employee is not expected to have any contact with children during this hour (with the exception of an emergency). This allowance can be accumulated to a maximum of 3 hours before taking it, so it can be taken in block amounts as in kindergartens.

7 CONCLUSION

As stated at the outset of this investigation, I wished to discover whether or not there had been any improvement in the numbers of students intending to work in the childcare field. If not, then I wished to discover what the reasons were.

I am able to report, however, there appears from the results presented here, that some progress has been made in the acceptance of childcare as a viable work option - still not as a first choice, but definitely as an option. I am still concerned that although a reasonable percentage indicated they would look at both kindergarten and childcare for positions that the childcare choice would only be a short-term measure until a kindergarten position became available. There is no direct evidence to support this view, only a feeling that unless the variables between the services even out that this is a distinct possibility. This was an area that was not covered by this study and I do feel that it is of major concern. If changes are made in pay rates, however, for childcare positions I feel that this would go a long way to encouraging graduates into childcare as a long-term career. Childcare pay rates came through as a major disincentive to the students in this survey - as it did in Renwick's. When "Before Five" reforms were instituted it was hoped that the improved funding would allow wages/ salaries to become equitable. However, there was no government directive issued to state that a percentage of the funding had to be used for this purpose. It was left up to individual employers to decide how the money should be spent. There are now calls (Dominion Sunday Times, October 1990) for early childhood centres to have the bulk funding tagged for specific use, and for all centres to be accountable for the money they receive. One solution to the pay rates issue would be for the government to take over this part of the financial management of early childhood centres. All early childhood staff would then be paid on the same scale throughout the country with no distinction made as to which service they are employed in. Kindergarten teachers are paid on this basis, as are all teachers throughout the education service. This would also raise the image of childcare employees to be accepted as "educators" of our young, rather than mere childminders.

Long hours worked in childcare was another cause of concern and I hope that sometime in the future there may come a solution to this problem. This would go some way to solving the feeling of being undervalued babysitters which leads on to the burn-out as identified by Passmore.

With more students showing a greater interest in childcare one can only hope that slowly the public perception of childcare will be raised and it will stand, as it always has, with its head high alongside the kindergarten service, but also be accepted as an equal partner in the field of early childhood education.

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